

LEARNING TO COMPETE IN A FLAT WORLD

by Dr. Thomas D. Layzell

As Thomas Friedman notes in his new book, *The World Is Flat*, we do live in a flat world. Technology has eliminated the barriers of space and time for many professions and jobs. It has also increased the value of educational attainment.

Nearly 60 percent of jobs require at least some postsecondary education, and that percentage is only going to increase in the future. As Gene Strong, secretary of the Cabinet for Economic Development, noted recently, Kentucky is competitive in the race to attract manufacturing jobs, but less so with the knowledge-based jobs that will increasingly drive state and national economies. As Secretary Strong says, "We've gotten the kinds of jobs we can compete for." Our challenge, therefore, is to raise Kentucky's level of competitiveness to that required by the world we live in.

The investments made in postsecondary and adult education since the 1997 and 2000 reform legislation have produced impressive gains: postsec-

ondary education enrollment has increased 27 percent, adult education enrollment has increased 149 percent, and degrees and certificates awarded have increased 37 percent. But we still have a long way to go, despite this progress.

Sixty percent of jobs require at least some postsecondary education, and that is only going to increase

Kentucky will need nearly 800,000 working-age adults with at least a baccalaureate degree to match the projected national average in 2020, nearly double the amount we had in 2000. If we make no change in our current rate of degree production, we will fall approximately 200,000 degree-holders short.

Achieving our goals will not be easy,

quick, or cheap. Kentucky's public colleges and universities are funded approximately \$250 million below the average of their benchmark institutions in other states. We must increase our investments in postsecondary and adult education if we are to achieve our goals. We must also achieve unprecedented levels of performance and productivity at all levels of education.

The potential payoff is significant—Kentuckians will realize a cumulative increase of \$71 billion in personal income and a cumulative increase of \$5.3 billion in tax revenue if we reach our 2020 goals.

The challenges facing us are formidable, but the benefits of increased educational attainment justify the investment of time, effort, and resources that will be required.

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